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MADONNA OF THE HARVESTS *By Carl Merschel*

Kingdom of the Blind

● **Frank Ford**

At rise, forestage is bare and dark. MARY, a girl about eighteen, is kneeling in a night-robe. A white spot from above picks her out but dimly so that only her face and a sketchy outline of her kneeling figure are discernible. She starts to make the sign of the cross. Midway through it her face contorts, her hand trembles uncontrollably and finally falls to her side as a green spot from below comes in, dimly at first. As she reaches the profane section of the prayer, the white light dims out and the green takes over.

MARY: Our Father . . . Who art in Heaven
Hallowed . . . Hallowed . . .

VOICE: Hollow is Thy fame.

MARY: Thy Kingdom . . .

VOICE: Thou three-ringed King . . . ding, dong, dung.

MARY: Thy will . . .

VOICE: *My* will on earth as 'tis in Hell,
In Hell, my swinish little one, in Hell.

MARY: Give us this day our daily . . .

VOICE: Yes, your daily bread of grist and ashes,
Your crust of worms that He gave you—or He permitted me.

MARY: (*tries to cross herself once more*): Oh, my God . . . Domine non sum dignus.

MARY and VOICE (*latter an undertone*): Domine, non sum *dignified* . . . (*laughs*) Domine, damn Dominum.

She collapses. BLACKOUT. Spots on the main stage area pick out the skeleton suggestion of a drab living-room of a midwestern farmhouse. The setting suggests poverty, bleakness, and a mixture of resignation and despair. Characters onstage are STURKROP (referred to hereafter as the PSYCHIATRIST), late 40's, an assured, calm, crisp, successful scientist; CRAIG, lounging, cynical, weary-toned, robust, and physically attractive reporter who shows more sign of wear than his thirty years require; MARTHA, sparse, worn farmhouse wife, with a thin, timid, querulous voice; JESS JOBMAN, her husband, bitter, violent, cruel.

JESS: I wouldn't loan out a broken-down mule, and here you, a stranger, try to borrow my little girl!

PSYCH: It's to your advantage. You want her cured?

JESS: Sure I want her cured, if she's really sick.

PSYCH: The sickest girl I know.
The car is coming in the morning to take me to the city. Let me take her too.

JESS: You say she's sick. Why not cure her here?

PSYCH: I can't work here with no equipment and with these village idiots
always underfoot, making their sickening little pilgrimages to a dis-
ease they regard as sanctity. Besides I'm needed at my clinic. I've
been away long enough already. It's been a sacrifice.

MARTHA: But we're thankful for your presence, Doctor; yes, indeed,
My husband and I are very grateful. You're such a comfort. . . .

PSYCH: I ask no thanks or fee. You could not buy or beg my time.
In a lifetime of poking in the rubbish heaps of human minds
Your daughter's case makes all my others seem like clocksprings.
She'll make my book. But she needs attention at a sanatarium.

MARTHA: No use to talk to me. Jess says no and he always wins.
She's been a drain on me, that girl, since these happenings.
I'd like to see her off my hands a while.

JESS: Hold your tongue.
Pretend to act like a mother or at least a decent broodmare.

CRAIG: If you win, save me a seat. You'll have the pleasure of my
company.

PSYCH: Leaving?

CRAIG: Yes, I've seen her bag of tricks and rusticated here a week.
I'm not the rustic type. This story's tapered off on news.

PSYCH: Another obstacle to my work—this scribbling misanthrope,
Who prowls about day and night, cataloguing my every movement
And your daughter's every twitch and tremor for the Sunday
supplement.

CRAIG: Merely spreading enlightenment and beauty to the masses.

PSYCH: You mean, pap and superstition!

CRAIG: Names! Names! You forget,
My trade is words.

PSYCH: I might take you along at that—a therapeutic ride.
If you and Mary were forced to listen to each other's chatter
You might both be shamed into sanity. Only I'd be raving.

CRAIG: Fair enough. Then you could write my stories; I'd psycho-
analyze for you.

PSYCH: No, I can spell. (*To Jess*) For your child's sake, please recon-
sider my request.

JESS: I can't. Mary's my one joy. Sick or well,
She's all I've got.

PSYCH: Come, man, you've your work, your wife.

JESS: There's no work to do without the rain, and as for that wife of
mine . . .
See that field of scrag?
That's supposed to be my corn crop. Too dry for even corn.
And when it's too dry for corn, it's too damn dry for living.

PSYCH: Perhaps you think she can make rain for you?

JESS: 'Taint my meaning. No rain for twenty days in this whole section of the state. And now there's plague at our livestock.

PSYCH: Drought or plague, I still don't follow.

JESS: The drought and Mary's strangeness came together. It's a judgment.

MARTHA: Looks like Father Boyd turning off the road. He's heading here. You heard about him, Doctor. He's our parish priest, the one that wrote about Mary to his bishop. I expect he's come for news.

PSYCH: Must we have this priest? He'll pester me and upset the girl.

MARTHA: Doctor, the priest'll be such good company for you and Mr. Craig;
You'll have so much in common—book-learning and all.

PSYCH: Oh yes, we'll have a long evening chat—a beautiful friendship.

JESS: You're no keener on his coming than I am.
I told him how I stand last Easter. He won't soon forget.
I said life scabs my arms and back enough
Without me wearing out my knees in cauterwauling.

MARTHA: I know you'll like Father Boyd, Doctor; he's a perfect saint.
And then he baptized Mary—that makes him sort of close.
He'll maybe help her somehow, or leastways he can try.
You've been here three days now. What have you done?

CRAIG: Bull's-eye, Oakley! I've watched this puzzler
Play mental crosswords with your noisy daughter
And he hasn't even solved the number one across.
FATHER BOYD enters

MARTHA: It's so good to see you, Father. This is the doctor.
And the other's that reporter come when the hubbub reached the city.

FATHER: Dr. Sturkrop. Mr. Craig. I even know your names already.
Details echo on the parish sounding-board faster than I move.
The chancery office wired me that you were coming for them, Doctor.
I meant to meet you sooner.

PSYCH: It's just as much a pleasure now.

FATHER: Thank you, but I feel guilty for this week's neglect of Mary.
You see, my parish spans two hundred miles, too long a fold
For a lame, rheumatic shepherd, and I have it all alone.

PSYCH: I can appreciate the difficulty. Too bad you can't spend more time
With this phenomenon of yours.

FATHER: How's Mary? Could I see her now?

PSYCH: She still exhibits all the traits you wrote of to the bishop:
Still the double voices, still the stubborn fastings.
And lately she's acquired certain new disturbing trends.

FATHER: I don't expect I'll understand them. The bishop wants my report
As well as yours, though why I'll never know. I've no head for this.

PSYCH: Then perhaps you'll support me against Jess in my proposal.
I'm returning to the city and I want to take the girl along
To treat her properly at my expense.

FATHER: A very charitable offer.

PSYCH: It's worth it to me. I'm doing research in the parapsychic field.

FATHER: The wire said you're highly thought of in your work.
I suppose they feel you'll be impartial.

PSYCH: Yes, I've done several errands for your chancery office,
Exposing frauds, deflating trances, turning light on visionaries—
That sort of thing. I think a miracle today would embarrass
Your Church almost as much as me. But here's the point.
With the girl in the city, the chancery office could send priests
Specially trained to probe your side of Mary's peculiarities.

FATHER: That sounds very reasonable. Don't you think so, Jess?

JESS: You know how I am about Mary, how the whole village feels.

FATHER: Yes, everyone would be upset. You know of the feeling, Doctor?
They're all prepared to canonize her living. The few that read
Books and papers declare our Mary's an American Theresa Neumann,
A special saint to help us through the drought and plague.

PSYCH: Take my word for it. This is no blessed magic; this is mania.

FATHER: How about the double voices?

PSYCH: Common to split personalities.

FATHER: Any signs of stigmata?

PSYCH: The only stigmata I've come across
Are the ones she printed on my arms with her fingernails.

FATHER: I guess you know your business. The girl must be demented.
I won't disturb her then. I'm sure you'll handle her.

MARTHA: You ought to look in on her.

PSYCH: No, that would be unwise. You might disturb her . . . prod unsettling memories. I assure you she'll get the best of care.

FATHER: You know best; I'm no hand for books. Guess I had it added wrong. I let her fasting and her high-flung carryings-on fool me . . . even figured them a sign of saintliness. But you're the doctor.

MARTHA: You're the priest.

JESS: Let him be when he's talking sense.

CRAIG: No, let him track down his stigmata. I need a fresher slant.

MARTHA: There's more than that. You've got to see her. There's horror. You don't know
The thing that walked in yellow-green in this room today.
I tried to make her eat this noon: You've been out all day—
You'll say it sounds outlandish and maybe I am daft;
I scarce can find it true myself, but I say I saw it so:
I was holding on the tray and she was at her couch
Trying hard to pray but stalling like a gear was loose,
When a vacuum dries the room and drags the walls in close,
Or so it seems. You couldn't hunt a breath;
And her face runs all apart like watered paint,
And a light's around and in her like no light I ever seen,
And all at once she's not set on the couch or floor.
I swear it looked like—I know you won't believe—
She seemed to stand in air, right clear off everything,
And there was noises and a haze around her feet.
It held like that, her hanging like a spider,
But without no thread at all, and then she screamed,
And next I seen her twisted on the floor.

JESS: Trust my wife for a short straight answer every time;
You've outdone yourself, Martha, in skipping sense.

PSYCH: Save that tale for church suppers and picnic campfires.

CRAIG: Now Doctor, not so literal
Let lovely lies lie; don't tear the spider's web.

FATHER: I think I'd better see her.

PSYCH: I'd rather that you didn't.
She's having one of her rare naps.

MARTHA: Yes, do. She always loved you.
Maybe she'll tell you the truth. This way, Father.

JESS: I ain't seen her yet myself today.

FATHER: I won't wake her up.
I'll just say a prayer or two and bless her.

PSYCH (*drawing him aside*): Then one word.
I heard about you from a friend down at the chancery office,
That you failed in your first assigned parish in the city
And were railroaded out to this desert scattered parish.

FATHER: They didn't tell details?

PSYCH: No, and I didn't ask.

FATHER: Part-charity.

PSYCH: I gather that you bungled hugely. Now no bungling near that girl.
Look at her, if you must, but don't wake her. She's my case.

FATHER: I understand. About that story—
PSYCH: I'll not tell—just walk the line.
(Father goes within)
PSYCH: I hope his visit won't set Mary back. I hate this meddling.
If there's one thing more irksome than amateur psychiatrists,
It's these misty-minded, sniveling, sanctimonious priests
Who come probing with their long, soft, wet, warm tapir-snouts.
MARTHA: The priest don't spigot miracles, but he's got some quiet sense.
JESS: On one point only does he make sense to me:
He too says I should have had some sons.
MARTHA: Why not kick me while you're at it?
PSYCH: These eternal undercurrents!
I came expecting madness in a girl but not a show of freaks;
And now this witch-doctor, probably drubbing her with the thighbone
Of some dead fanatic and drenching her with stagnant water.
CRAIG: His wizardry will do her no more harm than your chicanery,
Of the two imposters, the priest seems less pretentious.
How seriously you take her little act, her bid for notice.
(The girl screams within. The priest enters as if thrown and sprawls out on his knees.)
MARY (*possessed voice*): Out, pig, get out!
If you come back with your psalmist sighs,
I'll tear thirty-year-old wrappings from your soul.
(Two short quotations: one Latin, one Greek in her voice)
MARTHA: Help him. He's hurt.
CRAIG: That little maniac-monster.
(They rush over to him)
JESS: What did you do to her?
PSYCH: So this is the Daniel I protested, palsied by a shrieking girl!
MARTHA: You're shaking, Father. Little wonder. In fits like that
The girl's strong as several men! She hurt you, didn't she?
JESS: Did you hurt her is what I'm wondering. Speak up, man,
What happened?
CRAIG: Let him catch his breath and prepare his text.
PSYCH: I'll go to her.
MARTHA: Please stay. She's quieted already—not a sound.
The Father may be needing help.
FATHER: God knows I do, but where'll I find it?
I must confess to you all a terrible mistake I've made.
JESS: Now I know she's hurt.
FATHER: I couldn't hurt her if I'd wanted to.
She caught me up and hurled me with a circus strength.
I've been neither wise nor brave, I fear. More sheep than shepherd.
But that's no matter.

PSYCH: The fault is yours. I knew it.
A schizophrenic should be kept from well-intentioned bunglers.

FATHER: You lose me there, Doctor, with that oversized name you used.

JESS: Say your piece and have done.

MARTHA: Don't pay them any mind.

FATHER: I may trip up on words, but I can spell out a face.

JESS: Well, man, the point!

FATHER: I've given that girl every Sacrament. I knew her.
God smiled on her; she had a vigil-light inside.

CRAIG: And if we give her A's and stars for conduct, what then?

FATHER: I may sound like a doting fool but I thought these were marks
Of sanctity, until just now I looked at her and saw no good.
Just the abscessed cavities of evil. No Theresa Neumann there.

CRAIG: I liked the saint idea; good copy. Are you dropping it?

FATHER: I had it backwards—after what I heard and saw just now—
It tears me to say it, but I think the girl's possessed.

JESS (*dangerously*): What are you getting at?

PSYCH: Possessed of course, by madness.

FATHER: No, not possessed by madness; if it were only that.
She does, sees, and says things far beyond any madness.

MARTHA: Father, you can't be thinking of a devil? Saints deliver us!

JESS: You're the devil, man, if you suggest that the one bright bit of this black world has even the thinnest shade of bad.

CRAIG: A devil! Father, you've saved me; supplied a climax to my story
And a boot to boredom.

JESS: I'm not sure I credit devils;
I know I don't believe in your haloed hogwash.
And when you say my only girl—get out!

PSYCH: I've told you there are no cures in Bedlam.
Let me free the girl from this insane witch-hunt.
He'd burn her at the stake.

CRAIG: He couldn't send her off now. Why, man, where's your heart?
Home's her place with this, Jess. Better human interest too.
We'll import experts from the city. Besides, publicity could pad your pocket.

JESS: I don't know. Maybe Doc's right. But the priest goes first.

FATHER: I can't leave, not now, Jess. Have a little patience.
You could take her from us, Doctor, but not from the devil.
No, no high-falutin' literary use: I mean the Devil,
The serpent that slimed a garden,
I mean the first angel who burned his wings,

I don't say the girl's evil; evil has possessed her—
Though why he does and why God lets him I daren't guess.

PSYCH: Hold on, Jess. Let's puff his pipe a moment.
You say she has a devil; perhaps you glimpsed a cloven hoof?

CRAIG: Yes, what's the giveaway?

FATHER: Because you don't see horn or hoof,
You say there is no devil and he laughs in step with you.
His best friend is your disbelief.
He's tricked you with a child's crayon sketch.
I say I see him in the child; not just a child with sin.
That's a cartoon of a child alive with Sin Himself,
Besides—

MARTHA: What else? Did she rise up for you too?

FATHER: I mean that shrieking. She raved in foreign tongues:
In Latin and in Greek. She never knew a word of them.

PSYCH: Subconscious learning, smatterings she picked up in school.

MARTHA: They didn't teach her any foreign talk and we have none.

CRAIG: Perhaps echoes that she heard at Mass.

FATHER: No, not from Mass.
What she said in Latin is nowhere in the Holy Sacrifice.

JESS: Out with it. What did she say?

FATHER: I only knew the Latin.
I'm too rusty in the Greek. It was from the Book of Genesis
And roughly goes: The day you eat of the apple your eyes
Shall be opened and you shall be as God, knowing good from evil.

MARTHA: What would all that mean, Father?

FATHER: I'm not quite sure.
It was said by the serpent when he tempted Eve.
Maybe he means to open up our eyes. I can only guess.
I don't remember much about possession.

PSYCH: Not even well-grounded
In your ritual romances?

FATHER: I remember these earmarks of Satan:
Levitation, gift of tongues, and one thing more—
They say that when the devil sets up human housekeeping
He fights ousting, exorcism, by stirring those about him
To hatred and distrust of one another.

CRAIG: A catching angle. How?

FATHER: He tells the past of everyone who's ranged with him,
Lays bare to all each one's most hidden sin,
That way blocking a united drive to banish him.
I had to warn you.

MARTHA: I don't like the sound of this—it don't seem decent
For us to learn about each other—let's stop prying
For fear it might be true and it could spill us out.
You'd better take her off.

JESS: No need to take a chance.

FATHER: No, I'm afraid to let her leave. If the devil's rooted in her, we daren't budge her. I must notify the bishop; he'll send an exorcist.

PSYCH: I refuse to let you hobble her, condemn her for life to your spiritual crutches.

CRAIG: I for one need a crutch. After what she said you may need one, too, my friend. You see, I heard that
Greek and I know the passage.
The lines themselves may not mean much to you, something like:
They called me once the prophetess of lies,
The wandering hag, the pest of every door—
Attest ye now, she knows in very sooth
The house's curse, the storied infamy.

JESS: They sure are Greek.

CRAIG: They come from an ancient play.
They're the lines of Cassandra, a prophetess
Who never was believed. She spoke them over jeers
Before revealing royal sins and predicting butchery.

PSYCH: Craig, a qualm from you?

CRAIG: A passing twinge. My Irish mother
Always scented death and felt disaster in her bones.
Now I know what that feeling is. A page from the Inferno.
It was as if I were leaning against a pillar of stone,
Casually whistling, say "Humoresque," and suddenly
Glanced up and saw carven on the archway the inscription
"Gate of Hell" . . .

(Violent pounding sound. Spot hits MARY as she bursts open the door and runs out)

MARY: That water, throw away that filthy water.
It's wet, but it scorches bubbles; it's alive!
Spill it out, mix it with urine, defile it.
(She faints)

JESS: My baby! Lend a hand! Let's get her on the couch.

FATHER: I guess she means the holy water—I had a little vial
And left it in her room in hopes of hounding out the demon.

PSYCH: You'd pour kerosene on fire. Your fetish water by itself
Is no different from my spittle, but to this child
It's a symbol of fear, a bugaboo, a medieval whip.

MARTHA: Father, I'm scared. There's something hanging for a fall.
There might not be a show of secrets if we packed her off.
And yet I don't know what to say. . . .

JESS: Then don't.
PSYCH: If I take her
You'll find there's no cause for worry,
These banshee premonitions are a cheese-and-oyster dream.
FATHER: She must stay here, at least until they send an exorcist.
We need the Church's guidance.
PSYCH: I thought you had some vague
connection with the Church.
FATHER: The Church has two thousand years of wisdom stored behind her.
I never had a day of brains.
JESS: Hadn't counted on your help—but she stays.
FATHER: I'd feel responsible if they moved her.
PSYCH: You needn't. I'll take the rap.
FATHER: Have you no misgivings?
PSYCH: Why should I have? Have I ever seen, tasted, touched, or photographed a glimpse of your Hitler-minded, busy-bodied God
Or caught within the spectrum the flicker of a soul?
My mind's as open as a plateau of the moon, but not so open
That I don't like to keep it free from drafts.
FATHER: Why shut the door on me?
Must scientists discard all they cannot weigh and taste?
Forgive my ignorance—you see, I'm none too sure
What you are or what is psychiatry.
CRAIG: That I'd like to hear.
PSYCH: I'll say this to you—not to this off-key satyr;
A psychiatrist's a man with a hope for humanity
Locked up in him, thrust down by everyone he sees;
An idealist, a believer in sanity and in man
Who finds abnormality and acid-warped brains everywhere.
At least he starts so; soon just one faint hope remains
And one sure principle—we are no more than clay,
But so's the Taj Mahal and the peak of Everest,
And we may someday shake free to scale our summit,
But only by the mattocks of proof and measurement.
FATHER: You lean so strongly on your sense of touch. Are you sure
Your present lack of faith, or faith as you may call it
Is a thing you've arrived at—or have you fled to it?
PSYCH: I've no intention to empty out the pockets of my mind.
The girl's coming to
And, just as I predicted, in possession of her senses.
CRAIG: She still looks more possessed than in possession
Even to my skeptic eye.

MARTHA: She looks so unlike life,
As if her flesh is cold and her eyes melted in her head.

PSYCH: Perhaps she's not yet quite calm, but her pulse is normal,

(Girl shakes off his hand)

You two come; see if she recognizes you.

MARTHA: 'Twouldn't help none; I can't go near her now.
Look out, she's rising up; she might hurt us somehow.

(Girl half-sits up and points unwaveringly at JESS and at MARTHA who is cringing behind her husband)

JESS: Hell, I'll go to her. . . . Now why's she doing that?

(Light dimming down and focussing on Mr. and Mrs. J.)

MARTHA: Somebody go and stop her—I'm feeling weak and dizzy.

JESS: You know, I am too. . . . Martha, where are you?

MARTHA: It's getting dark. Did you forget to light the lamps?

JESS: Too dry for fog but it's so thick I can't see you or them no more.

MARTHA: I can't either. Jess, there's something terrible wrong.

(Spot fades. Music. Faint green light on girl's face.)

GIRL'S VOICE: Slip slow the cogs, and set the gears reversed,
Backreel the thread, play the hidden counterpoint,
Return coffee and cup to bean and sand,
Bottle spent steam and back the endless belt,
Shrink shapes to shadows and glimpse a legend
Faint-found on memory's tombstones. Go back, aback.

(Spot up on Mr. and Mrs. Jobman: slight costume change, younger voices and manners. MARTHA is sitting in a rocking chair, knitting quietly. JESS comes up behind her stealthily, throws his arms around her, kisses her. They struggle; she pushes him off. Their voices sound at first far off and faint . . . gradually louder)

MARTHA: Now don't try that any more. The answer still is no.

JESS: Martha, don't. Don't fend me off. You've played that game too long.

MARTHA: As God's my judge, no game—I couldn't play so firm and joyless.

JESS: God again. No god would put such fire in me and ice in you.

MARTHA: Men love to make up stories about themselves.
Roman candles think they're volcanoes.

JESS: Martha, can't you feel the night? It's charged,
And there's a coiled ache in me—Mary is six months old
Don't drive me mad—the doctor said—

MARTHA: Easy for the doctor. He ain't me.

JESS: Easy for you, too. You ain't me. Look how my hands are shaking.

MARTHA: That's all your kind wants of a woman—

JESS: You know that ain't so, but I'm no hand-kissing fancy dan.
I've waited long and patient.

MARTHA: You'll wait even longer.
I can't—that's all.

JESS: There's worse husbands, ain't there? What've I done to you?

MARTHA: Don't you know? You got me with child. I won't have another.

JESS: I suppose havin' kids ain't a woman's duty?

MARTHA: You're just a man. That's what all men think.
So long's you get your way, you don't care
What comes to me. You'd have a wedding on my grave.

JESS: Your grave? What woman's drivel's this?

MARTHA: You heard me plain.
I got a surefire feeling another child'd be my death.

JESS: Hogwash and you know it.

MARTHA: Oh, do I now?
My mother died when I was born. I almost died with Mary.

JESS: I knew you were in pain, but the doctor didn't say—

MARTHA: What of it? He didn't have to. I know when I've had my fill!

JESS: But when she *was* born, wasn't it worth it then?

MARTHA: Oh sure, the joy of motherhood. You thirsty, careless men
Tell each other that to shore up your own proudness,
And the women spin on the fable in their fear and weakness—

JESS: Other mothers tell me it's a time to envy.

MARTHA: Maybe they do. Other women are other; I'll tell you how I felt.
They trussed me with barbed wire and ducked me kicking into quicklime.
I thought I was dead but I woke and they placed Mary next to me.
You'd want me to have jumped up glad and giddy. Not me!
That hairless ugliness looked like the bony head of death.
And there was in me one thought—one wash and flood of feeling.
"I didn't die. I lived. I lived." There's your truth.

JESS: Hell, I ain't the cause why you're a woman,
And for all the good you are to me, you might not be one.

MARTHA: I tell you I'm afraid of birth because it spells out death.

JESS: Any animal has better instincts than that.

MARTHA: An animal can't help itself, but I can and will!

JESS: Even so, why figure on a child? I'm not asking for another.
Look at the moon. Hell, woman, you're moon-safe.

MARTHA: The moon's a crooked clock, a mixed up midwife.
I thought I was moon-safe a year or so ago—now there's Mary.

JESS: A mistake, yes. But then there are other ways.

MARTHA: Yes, things forbidden by the Church and hated by the priest.
I'm afraid of death, sure, but no less scared
Of dying after death. I'll have no part of that.

JESS: The priest'd tell you that denying me is just as much a sin.

MARTHA: He might, but I won't ask him. I guess God knows how I feel.
I figure I'm a special case; my conscience doesn't bite.

JESS: The devil take your conscience if he's not already got it.
You mean you'll not have me any more?

MARTHA: That's the way of it.

JESS: With all your fears, you're not afraid to tell me that?

MARTHA: Why should I be? (*He advances*) Don't touch me.

JESS: Why not?

MARTHA: Jess don't!! (*Cries*) Look, you've got me crying.
Don't my tears make any difference?

JESS: Where's the reason? Tears? Your tears?

MARTHA: You'll not hit me! I've done nothing.

JESS: Life is nothing either.

(He seizes her and starts to strangle her despite her scream. Suddenly he drops her in a heap)

JESS (*dully*): No.

MARTHA (*gasping, half-hysterical*): I really thought for a moment that you'd kill me.

JESS: Kill you? Of course I was going to, but no, not just now.
Someday I'll stop your fears, but I'll give you first a foretaste.
You cut me off! I have no rest. Well, you'll not either.
You'll have the most attentive husband a woman ever had.
I'll not pass a single day without some torment just for you.
I'll make it up with pains and thoughtfulness. Before I'm through
You'll fear me more than death or God Himself.
You seen the priest this week, think your soul is clean;
I think your stingy cowardice has blacked your soul
As bad as it can be, but you don't . . . so
I'll wait and wait, and when I see you think you've sinned,
And feel you're dead inside, and fear death double,
That's when—you won't know ahead—I'll kill you slowly, twice,
Send you carefully to the grave, and beyond it into fire.

(BLACKOUT in that area. GIRL'S laughter. Spot hits MARY only. She rocks on her heels and chants)

MARY: Blend wife and husband in a pot;
Add emotion; stir till tired;
Grate for friction until hot;
Oil the stove before it's fired.

Use promises unkept as chive;
Bake around a wedding ring;
When uncoiled, the ring's alive;
Love becomes a serpent's sting.

(Light grows slowly on stage to reveal characters much as before, a scene back. They stare at one another silently. The spell is broken at last, when JESS lurches forward and slaps MARTHA cruelly across the mouth)

JESS: Sow! A good reminder! Not that I need reminding!

(She backs away fearfully; he stalks after her—is brought up short by the priest who steps between them)

FATHER: Keep away. Don't touch her again.

JESS: Why not? Because you think she's a woman?

FATHER: Because you think yourself a man.

JESS: Get out of my way.

FATHER: No.

JESS: Because you ain't man nor woman,
I'll not bother hitting you. But I'll remember.

MARTHA: Yes, he'll remember with his harrow-toothed leech-mind.
I've offered him forgetting two years back.

FATHER: At an age of safety.
That's no answer, Martha.

JESS: Forgetting! Her overdue generosity!
Your snaggly, mildewed hulk ain't fit to fertilize a field.
But even if you was a grain-store calendar, I wouldn't care.
I'm finding too much pleasure in your starts and squalling.

FATHER: Have you lived on hate all this while?

CRAIG: We all live on something. There are weaker props.

MARTHA: His hate was growin' weaker the past few years. He was gettin' sort of only mechanically mean. . . . Until just now I had a dream of eighteen years ago—he must have shared it at her causin'. I can't tell you. . . .

CRAIG: Your private little dream? You might as well have made a film of it, and flashed it on the screen.

MARTHA: You mean you know what happened?

FATHER (*to Craig*): Needlessly cruel!
(*To Martha*): Yes I fear it's true. Somehow she made us see it, too.

MARTHA: You all saw it?

FATHER: It was like a glimpse of Purgatory.

MARTHA: Father, could it be that? Is that how you saw it?
I mean, could we all have died without our knowing?
Could we be dead and think we're living?
Maybe we really are in Purgatory.

JESS: More like Hell.

FATHER: No, Martha, we're alive enough—at least in flesh.

MARTHA: So you know. Oh, I don't care a bobbin for the shame of it.
He's made me live so long with pain, sleep so thin,
That shame's a comfort even only as a change from fear.
But now she's against me; what will stop him now?
And if not him, what will keep her checked? Doctor, I agree.
You can take the girl for treatment. Take her right now.

FATHER: Martha, you can't mean that. It isn't natural.

MARTHA: Can't I? She used to act as a buffer twixt him and me,
Softened him somewhat, helped us both, even pretended to love me—
Now she stirs him up again, pumps him with acid. I couldn't stand those first few years again.
She'll have to go.

JESS: Damn weathercock!

MARTHA: You see? Oh, the Doctor's right. He needs time and the right place to help her.

FATHER: Well, Jess, do you agree?

JESS: Hell, I don't care so long's the girl gets well again.

CRAIG: Looks like that abracadabra won a point for you.

JESS: But it's easy for that animal to send her off
Now she thinks she's no more use. She hates the kid.

CRAIG: What high-priced copy this will make.

FATHER: You don't care about her, do you?

MARTHA: It's a fact I haven't loved her. I guess I've tried,
But you heard how I felt when I had her. Other women
May feel they've made something special by a birth
Like a Sunday cake with fancy frosting,
I couldn't. I see a death's-head every time I look at her:
It's like trying to love someone that almost killed you
Or even death itself.

FATHER: Even that has been managed.

CRAIG: Yes, death can dress up quite presentably.

MARTHA: Doctor, you have my say so—take her away like you wanted.
Treat her, make her well, take all the time you need—
Only do it soon. Doctor, don't you hear me?

PSYCH: Yes, I hear well enough. But give me a moment to think.

MARTHA: What for? You wouldn't go back on your offer now?

PSYCH: I must right now. There's so much work to do,
I don't know where I thought I'd find
The time to treat her properly.

MARTHA: No, take her along when you go.
You saw the terrible things she made us all see just now.
PSYCH: See? I don't know what you mean.
MARTHA: You must have. They all did.
CRAIG: Of course he did. Why, peeping's second nature to him.
PSYCH: I tell you I saw—nothing.
MARTHA: Nothing at all?
CRAIG: The convenient eye of science.
PSYCH: My eyes and mind are open. I repeat. I saw nothing.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

On Rereading Moby Dick

• **Sr. M. Maura, S.S.N.D.**

Call me Ishmael. Of that voyage
exorcised of the Word's spray-springtime,
I am he. Slippery decks
went reeling wave-ward, rime
upon the quarter deck grip for Ahab's bone.
Call me one whose aching grapple
with Jonah's woe is storiate stone
unlifted to the prow of Father Mapple;
one who knelt with Queequeg to his icon (and
it failed), cringed before an eyeless statue;
saw the hump of sperm whale; bland
malignity of whiteness churning tail-
concentric circles sucking to a pinpoint
Dante never meant. One whom Rachels wail.
For harpoon, jib and spar,
sea monsters fought or diced;
before the ship lunged down, I dreamed
or dared it to be Christ.

No matter. Extra-seasonal Novembers
pollinate again.
Call me Ishmael, broken-hearted.
Homily's end. Amen.

Ebb

• John A. Lynch

THE DOCTOR left early and then it seemed that the nurse all in white came to sit by the bedside. She sat there a long while, it seemed, he could see her sitting there, but somehow she was very distant and when finally he reached out to touch her she wasn't there at all.

It was shortly after that Martha came in. Strange, he hadn't known she was coming—he hadn't seen her in years—but she walked in very lightly, without speaking, somehow not quite looking right at him. She wore a skirt with ruffles that began near the waist and billowed out until they would seem to fill the room. He had never seen her dressed like this before—but then it had been years. He expected her to take a chair and when she didn't he turned to ask the nurse to get her one but she was gone. He turned back to Martha and suddenly she was gone too. The ruffles were there, billowing, nearly filling the room, but she was gone. He looked for her among them but she was gone. He hadn't counted on this, neither her appearance nor her disappearance, and he could feel now the moisture in his palms.

The sheets were white, the blanket was white and the far wall of the room, the only one he could see in any way, was white. The nurse had been in white but she was gone now. The sheets were white, they were warm and there was a stiffness to them as if the whiteness had been baked into them. They were not stiff because they could not be folded, no, they were stiff to the touch of his fingertips, stiff where they touched his elbows. He had felt it first with his fingertips, his right hand, then his left hand, using his fingertips one by one, and when he concentrated he could feel the sheets stiff at his elbows. He couldn't feel them along his arms though and only barely at his shoulders, which were really beneath him now, lying there, so that he couldn't work with them and touch the sheets with them as he could with his elbows and his fingertips. And when he wasn't feeling the sheets now he could curl his fingers back and feel the moisture in his palms, because when Martha had disappeared he had begun perspiring again.

When next he looked toward the far wall he could not see it for the billows that rose and the clouds that were there. The nurse in white had brought the clouds and Martha had brought the billows flowing from her skirt and now they filled the room. But the nurse would come and she would open the windows soon, she would do that at least.

Then through the clouds and the billows came Colonel LaFarge to stand by the foot of the bed, but it

was only yesterday that he had seen him. "Down here," he called to the colonel because the man was looking around as if he couldn't see just where the bed was. "Colonel, I'm down here." But Colonel LaFarge only continued to stand there, looking into the distance, looking right past him but never seeing him. Then the colonel took up his crop and held it in both his hands, across his heavy belt, and said, all the while laughing: "You heard that on the radio .... on the radio .... radio .... radio .... radio ...." until his voice drifted away and he was gone and all that was left was his laughing, and it frightened him as he lay there because he had never heard this thing before.

The laughing went on, frightening and hysterical, as if the man were mad, then gradually died and seemed to become a far away thing, as if from a room down the corridor perhaps, or from a room somewhere he did not know about, or from nowhere.

He wished the doctor would come back. The doctor would explain these things to him. And if he could not explain them, perhaps he would give him morphine again. Perhaps he would do that at least. Or open the windows. But the nurse would open the windows when she came back and that would be soon, probably right away, because she was never gone long, she never left him for long.

Years ago, it was in the country then, he remembered the day he had stepped into a nest of yellowjackets. He had been in the woods all morning with his friends, and at noon, on their way home, to see ahead farther, he had stepped up on a pine stump, into what he had thought was a patch of yellow moss, and the infuriated moss had sped up his leg beneath his trousers and the yellowjackets were all over him. If the doctor came back he would give him the morphine certainly. "It's just like the yellowjackets," he could say to the doctor, "that's just what it's like. Just like the yellowjackets right up my leg!" But there was nothing save the white clouds and the billows and these as if there was to be no end to them.

That morning long ago they had rolled down the slope of the woods on the slick of fallen pine needles. The ground was brown with the needles and high above the checked trunks of the trees rose to where the branches were set in whorls. They had played up and down the slope and far back into the shadows of the woods where they found windflowers growing small and white around the stumps of cut trees and wintergreen cropping up between. All morning, and then they had started home and he had stepped into the nest of yellowjackets. The others had laughed because he had leaped so. He had torn off his shoe, torn off his stocking and then his trousers. How they had stung! When the doctor returned he would tell him about the yellowjackets and how they had stung. Certainly he would give him the morphine then, certainly he wouldn't wait for anything after hearing that.

The nurse had said: try to think of something else. But the clouds

stirred in the room now and he could think of nothing else. He could not sit up and the clouds gathered and now stopped still, now spun, now turned and the bed too had begun to turn. He grew dizzy but he could not sit up to stop the dizziness, he could not sit up at all. He tried, but he could only move his shoulders a little, just a little from the bed, straining, just an inch away from the awful turning now, but he couldn't raise himself. He dug his elbows into the stiff white turning sheet but he couldn't break away.

In his palms he felt the hot, moist perspiration and he dug his fingernails into his palms because the yellowjackets and the clouds were swirling up now. They were so heavy in the room he could not see the windows now, could not see the wall, he could see only the bright golden flashes of the yellowjackets as they spun through the clouds. He could feel the perspiration running on his sides, down from his armpits, disappearing into the stiff white sheet, and unclenching his fists he felt again the cotton that bound the bed. He scratched at the sheet with his fingernails and with the tips of his fingers. Then the yellowjackets came faster, faster through the air and he reached his fingers to the sides of the bed and grasped in his hands the edges of the sheet and the strong padded mattress beneath.

The yellowjackets swirled and soon from their midst ran great red flames, shooting out from the billowing folds of the clouds, shooting out until the flames licked at the far white wall and into the far corners of the room filling it. And with the flames came the roar of them, a deafening sound that enveloped the whirring of the insects, and the flames licked up the far wall, darting in and out among the clouds and the room was burning, the bed itself was burning and he felt that he had to scream. But when he opened his mouth no sound came, not even a faint sound, and he lay panting now, cowed by the flames, and the clouds unfurled red with fire as he drew his muscles taut in defense.

Think of something else! Think of something else! It had been on a hillside and he had been lying on his back, late in the afternoon sun, late summer and the sky was flaming up in great fiery streaks of light. He had lain there and watched the clouds go low to touch the far trees of the horizon in the north and to the west, and between the clouds he saw the red-orange drop of the sun hang bleeding on the tips of far pines and farther places beyond. Fading away, he had watched the sun disappear from sight, and leave behind then, growing where it had gone, flat rays of horizontal light. Then these too had disappeared and the fiery streaks of flame had leaped above the horizon, had struck the clouds, had burned the clouds and spreading out had seized that corner of the world and the sky was all red, red, red!

It had happened in an instant, it seemed, and it had terrified him then, so that when he had sat up he had been trembling all over and

chilled beneath the great heat that the sun had left behind.

Now in the room in which he lay the flames that had begun as myriad tormenting insects were leaping and burning the clouds. The roar of the flames was deep in his ears, shut in by the closed windows and the white walls and he could not get away. His hands clutched at the blistering sheets and he felt that he soon would be punching his fingers through the sheets, making holes in them But the holes would only serve to trap him, he would be caught by the holes and held by them and there was no place to go. The windows were closed, the far white wall of the room was enclosed by other white walls, the clouds were billowing red and there was no place to go.

But he would escape, he would, he would, he could, there must be a way, and he would tell them later, he would tell the doctor and the nurse who had let him lie like this, he would tell them, and they would give him the morphine for certain then and open the windows to release the clouds and the heat that were pressing him now. So subtly he let go the sheets from his grasp and slid his hands along the stiff whiteness of them, then quickly, so that no one saw, closed his hands into tight fists and held them that way, by his sides, quietly, motionlessly, and the rumpled sheets fell back on them and he lay still, escaping.

He lay between the white sheets escaping and the flames began to disperse and soon were seen to die. The heat of them disappeared as if a cool breeze had come suddenly and with the flames went the clouds and he relaxed then, satisfied, his eyes closing slowly, subtly again, stealing away from the fading clouds, the flames of sunset, the oppressive heat, stealing away and the tight muscles of his face relaxed, his heavy breathing lightened, his nails ceased to dig into his palms and his fists came open so that his fingertips once again touched the dry white cotton of the sheets. His shoulders fell back on the edge of the pillow, his arms rested quietly again, his elbows touched into the sheet unfeeling and he lay that way a long time escaping. He was lying that way when the nurse found him.

O Gentle Death

● **Raymond Roseliep**

Pad-footed climb the tower stair
of mind's too quiet cell;
coax gently at the last nerve rope
that tugs your bell.

And though I will not hear the stroke
that names me wholly free,
enough—to catch the soundless chime:
eternity.

The Profession of Liberal Arts

• Brother D. John, F.S.C.

THE scholarly world has not been amiss in its support of the liberal arts. From time immemorial there has been the insistence upon courses in the college curriculum in the area which has come to be known as "culture." Even with the advent of the Age of Science, most colleges and universities have remained staunchly loyal to the tradition of the liberal arts in education. Too often, however, it is a loyalty to the tradition without any very convincing action in behalf of the students.

Advocates of these courses have held out the goal of "training men to live," while leaving to their more mundane colleagues the task of training students to make a living. The liberal arts have been justified on the vague ground of the full life, or of culture, or perhaps as a source of leisure time activities.

There has been the insistent voice from the past, gentle but not very persuasive, urging the refinement of culture. Hesitantly it whispers that if the liberal arts have no place in the work-a-day world, at least the business man, finished with his daily toil, can return to his home in the suburbs to impress his wife and children with his better nature. Do we hear him sigh: "Here, our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Might not we hope, the voice goes on, that our culturally educated scientist will punctuate his day with recollections in tranquillity (possibly in heroic couplets) as he goes from test-tube to spectrograph to sink. Or what more touching scene than the atomic scientist gathering his family about him for a visit to the local art museum to while away his leisure moments in cultural contemplation.

Undoubtedly, these sugared claims for the liberal arts or "cultural" courses in the college curriculum spring from a faulty understanding of the meaning of *culture* in human affairs. The word is derived from the Latin word meaning "till" or "cultivate." Culture refers to the full growth of something, in this case the human person. The *cultural* courses are justified in college pre-professional programs if one is not satisfied with a partially developed personality, or if we place importance on such human attributes as judgment, appreciation, sentiment, imagination, and idealism. What are the values we seek in a man? In a particular circumstance we look for, say, a specific knowledge of organic chemistry. But do we not seek equally imagination, insight, devotedness?

The ideal of the liberal arts program is not to be identified with that ideal of ancient Greece which discriminated between freeman and slave, nor with the ideal of the medieval scholastic; it refers rather to the forma-

tion of a man's highest powers: the full growth or "culture" of a man of our own day.

In the *scientific* training of our students we are dealing with a well defined kind of knowledge, and employ a certain inexorable logic in reaching our conclusions. Along the frontiers of the sciences are many problems as yet unsolved, but in college work in the sciences almost all time available is spent filling out the student's knowledge of well-trodden paths of scientific lore.

Where is the student of the sciences to learn to evaluate conflicting claims to truth? Where will he be compelled to seek an answer to problems in various orders of certitude, if not in the study of human affairs?

There is a persistent trend in our country today to have our citizens express their opinions upon a variety of public questions. The humblest artificer is stopped on the streets: "What is your opinion of the U.N.? Should the Red Chinese be admitted to the U.N.? What about the Point Four program in Africa? How should the divorce laws of the States be amended?" The students of our high schools and colleges sit in solemn council to express their ill-founded, superficial, and prejudiced opinions upon the most vexing questions of our national life. During these formative years of life it is a real outrage to have these students discuss the economic, social, psychological, and anthropological aspects of divorce, let us say, when they are so grossly ignorant of the very heart of the matter—the meaning of conjugal affection. Better far that they would read to understand:

> Didst thou but know the only touch of love
> Thou would'st as soon go kindle fire with snow,
> As seek to quench the fire of love with words.

Or that they have known the poet's lines:

> Alas, the love of women! It is known
> To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
> For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
> And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring
> To them but mockeries of the past alone,
> And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
> Deadly and quick, and crushing; yet, as real
> Torture is theirs, what they inflict they feel.

Is not the all-important study of these and countless other questions the proper duty of our college men? Where, if not in the broad fields of the humanities, will our graduates ever learn the basic truths of humanity, of human relations, of themselves and their kind?

The student of the sciences is exposed hour after hour to a discipline in which he is led to find answers to stated problems. There is usually one correct answer, known with certainty to the professor, plus a multitude

of wrong ones. Should not his training lead him to consider those fields wherein there are a number of *correct* answers to the *same* question? To study the involved and complex questions of history and literature is to have such training.

What is the distinctly Christian heritage of Western civilization? What are the causes of the violent rise of nationalism in the world today? Are the moderns in painting and music and philosophy in the cultural stream of our particular civilization? Does government interest in social security threaten our personal liberties?

These are questions which require a broad study of many points of view. One must look into every aspect of human affairs to obtain a complete grasp on any of these problems. Here one must weigh evidence for and against; here one must balance Gibbon and Toynbee and Spengler and St. Augustine as they grapple with the understanding of the City of God. In these problems we must temper the idealism of Woodrow Wilson with the single-mindedness of Winston Churchill; we must marvel at the devotion of Mahatma Gandhi, and wonder at the effectiveness of passive resistance as we see Pakistan and the Indian Union join the world family of nations.

Let us now pose the question of the necessity of the liberal arts for the training of scientific personnel. To ask this question with a full understanding of the nature of the liberal arts and the subject matter with which it deals is to provide automatically the answer. A man's spirit is capable of unlimited development; but, like his other powers, must *be* developed. One does not become imaginative or original by some gift of the gods. Neither do the gods bestow understanding, prudence, or wisdom.

The problem of the liberal arts in the training of the scientist does not lie in the curriculum itself. It is not a matter merely of insufficient hours available for courses in history, literature, philosophy, etc. Usually there are ample semester hours available for a thorough training in the humanities. But these hours must be employed in teaching the liberal arts for the values they alone can bring. The "scientific" study of the liberal arts defeats the very purpose for which these matters are included in the scientific man's college curriculum. If these liberal arts subjects are justified in the science program on the basis of their "cultural" contribution, let this be the criterion of judgment. If they are consciously and vigorously taught for their *humanistic* values—by all means they are necessary to the full development of the pre-professional student. If, on the other hand, these humanistic values are lost sight of, let "liberal arts" pass unmourned from the scene.

If the study of literature be merely the study of artistic forms, or of the intricate dependence of author upon author; if history be only a chronological record of reign and war and conquest; if philosophy and religion do not come to grips with the problems of a present day American young man; if foreign language be merely a study of syntax and grammar and vocabu-

lary—if all these subjects be taught without regard for their humanistic values, what is their justification in the pre-professional training of the scientist? Courses in philosophy and literature and history are not liberalizing or humanizing by virtue of their name; if they are to contribute to the cultural development of personality they must be taught deliberately for their humanistic content. Let history provide the opportunity to study mankind in its social nature; let literature be the occasion for the enlargement of the spirit and the learning of wisdom. Let it help answer that fundamental question: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?"

It is a great mistake to think of the scientist as lying outside the regular context of life—to think that he could be a successful scientist before understanding things much more basic. A man is not a scientist for some portion of his day's labors, and later a gentleman of culture. His culture, if it exists at all, exerts its influence at every moment of his career. Or, if this true culture be lacking, prejudice, stubbornness, and pride blind the student of science equally with all other men.

The student of science, together with all other students, must strive with the most ambitious, must grasp with the greedy, must fall with the weak. He must feel the desolation of abandonment, not lightly but with the full power of his soul. In music, a knowledge of the leitmotif of countless works means little in the liberal education of our man of science. But to experience in Beethoven supersensible realities of the spirit, or to feel the overpowering loneliness of the overture to *La Traviata*—these and countless other experiences of the spirit are the essence and core of a liberal education.

Whoever would understand rightly the possibilities as well as the limitation of science and would contribute his bit to the advancement of the world will not do it solely by a detailed study of formulae, graphs, and equations. Rather must he study, in its turn, what has been recognized for some thousand years and more as the source of humanistic learning—history, the arts, and literature.

The liberal arts courses in the college curriculum, provided they be taught for their humanistic values, form an important, and indeed an integral part of the pre-professional education of the student in the natural sciences.

In Future Issues:

- A Maritain Profile *by James Kritzeck.*
- Dawson's Christian Institute *by John Mulloy.*
- A Philosophy of Modern Art *by Sr. M. Jeanne, O.S.F.*
- The Theater in Philadelphia *by Dan Rodden.*

Am *I* Our Artists' Keeper?

• Carl Merschel

ALL Art is the record of an adventure that has to do with both matter and spirit. The quest for Design is like any search after order in human affairs, political or otherwise; the search for data to define the potential of each human being and to evidence the variety that is the essence of life remains today, as always, unmistakably in the foreground of the discussion concerning the artist and his audience.

Our generation has been trained to think of Art as a luxurious pastime. The artist is a romantic Hollywood mixture of weaknesses, eccentricity, and exotic imaginings to be enjoyed during the off-hours between war and commerce. Actually, the artist is far less temperamental than he appears. He knows he has work to do with his hands and brain and only asks permission to do it with the least disturbance. His antic reputation and often completely repelling "superficiality" come from his sense of the ignorance of people about Art, in particular those who *know what they like.*

Yet his anger is understandable if one stops to consider that the artist has never deserted his job since the beginning of this thing called mankind. Every article we have ever used or want to use and love has been subjected to a selective process, some choice of pattern, form, surface, and color. In modern times, however, this work is less and less the responsibility of the only man recognized and qualified in the past to do it. He is the artist, traditionally the *responsible workman*, whose function today is left to the anti-humanism of ignorance and profit.

So in his essays Eric Gill could define, once and for all, the unnatural divorce between what our time labels Beauty (for the museum) and the True and the Good (banished to departments of theology and moral philosophy). The intellectual depravity of most of our church structures, and the seeming complacency with which, in the majority of places, people will tell you they do not know anything about music, for example, but they do know what they like makes the anguish imposed on the clear-minded like Maritain a scandal. Granted that God is Good, the Thomist must argue, how would a moral theologian react if someone said to him: "I don't know what is Good, but I know what I like doing"? How would the head of a seminary or a pastor take it if those in his charge said: "I don't know what is true, but I know what I like thinking"? Yet the artist is met at every turn with the same unconscious blasphemy, uttered in his case without the faintest respect or pity.

Aside from the logic of the Thomist position, which is proper to a Catholic as such, we cannot ignore the standard of life desired by a good pagan as a man. He would claim that reason alone should recognize the inconsistency of the dandified aestheticism our schools have inherited from

MELCHIZEDEK
By Carl Merschel

the 19th century, and he would be nauseated by the "hearts and flowers" attitude of the Enlightenment that produced it. Sensual wallowing in any form is to be castigated; no responsible pagan could accept the Art designed to titillate Victorian businessmen, now fostered in its cretinous soap opera maturity for the dictatorship of advertising.

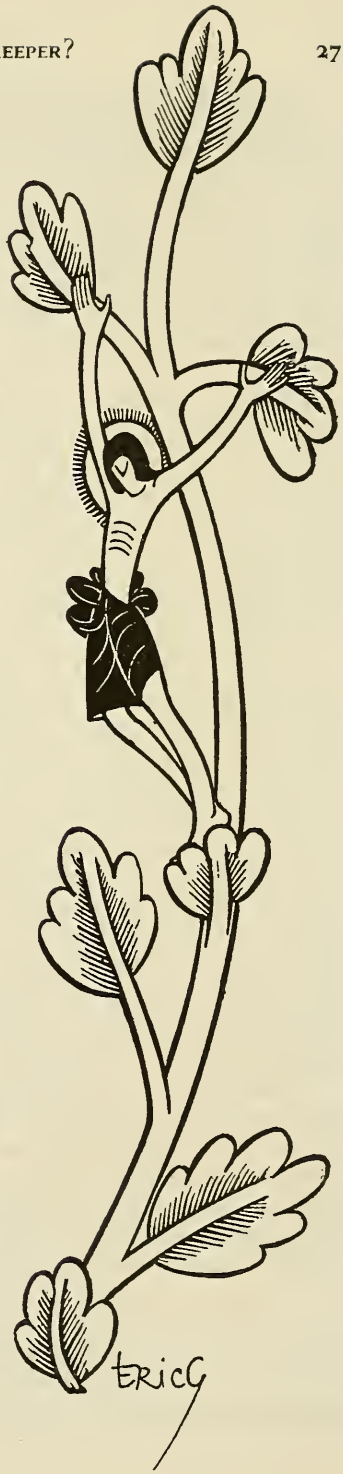
We quarrel about styles, taste, tradition, and "modernism" chiefly because of the artificiality of our standards. Students are conditioned to approach art as something apart from life, since we are attracted by the surface apart from the soul; by the most obvious accidents in the philosophic sense, like dyed blonde hair, instead of the inexhaustible substance and mystery of woman, for instance, as wife and mother. There can be no other explanation on rational grounds of what everyone unconsciously demands and gets from the billboards, the ads, and the magazine covers; no other reason for the prevailing fiction they mirror so faithfully. If all the trivia and "cuteness" (by which the arts are measured without mercy) were by some miracle gone tomorrow, there would probably be no so-called love or affection—as we know and practice them—left in society.

"By their fruits you shall know them" is the Biblical argument, yet we go so far as to color oranges because their natural skin is not standardized enough. An orange on the tree is more beautiful than ten Solomons in all their glory. Like the lily in the parable it is, in itself, more precious than any outfit money could buy. Instead of the patented monotony of one orange like any other orange at the supermarket, an orange ripening on its own is actually a spectrum and a sunset of orange and the components of its special color—a phenomenon somehow closer to the

mystery and wonder of nature and metaphysics which in our time seem fit only for poets, potters, and other misfits. For it is exactly in refusing to gild the lily by flattering, through camera angles and deceptive makeup, a man who orders a portrait that the "modern" artist seems most strange.

On the contrary: Beauty is independent of what we consider "representational" and "photographic." A beautiful thing is beautiful in function and therefore by reason of its own nature, its own fulfillment of existence. The beauty of a portrait is independent of the glamour or animal magnetism of its subject, regardless of how many beauty contests she may have won. A spider and a toad are not ugly because a man does not find them either pleasant or useful. An oak leaf and a sugar maple in autumn are beautiful, but not because some man or other associates them with Good. They are beautiful in themselves (like the spider and the toad); they are not beautiful because they are like anything else on earth. We think a portrait is supposed to be exactly like its subject, but an oak leaf or a sugar maple or an animal is beautiful on its own and absolutely. And so is a human being, and so should be the picture of a human being.

We dare not speak of pure ontological radiance here, the beauty of Being itself, as it shines in and through all Creation —the beauty of things as they are, the definition of Beauty itself, which is Existence; rather we are concerned with the special kind of existence, the special kind of beauty that is proper to things made by men, and obviously the existence and the beauty of mankind is different from the rest of creation in that men are able to create new things in the world, like cathedrals, power dams, and bridges.



Pre-Renascence art is not, as many do sneer, unimportant because verisimilitude (the mere copying of outward appearances) was not attempted in "such primitive art"; it is only unappetizing to their way of thinking. For the fabulous monsters at Notre Dame in Paris are not unbeautiful because, so far as they "represent" anything at all, they speak of the diabolic, the malformed and the corrupt. The camera and the handbook of reptiles do not divide between them the whole business of beauty. St. Thomas agrees with St. Augustine that an image is beautiful if it suitably portrays even an ugly thing.

A work of art is not to be judged beautiful in the degree of its likeness to something, and this is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that a work of art is not to be judged beautiful in the degree of its likeness to something lovable. I emphasize the point here because most of what we consider beautiful today has no relationship whatever to the absolute beauty of the classic in either art or theology. If, as is natural, we find a woman more lovable than a snake, it does not follow that a portrait of Cleopatra is more beautiful than some adequate and spirited representation of an asp, even of the deadly asp which might certainly be a part of her picture.

Finally, ugliness in a work of art (for instance, in a Rouault painting or the sculpture of Sister Thomasita) is not measured by the degree to which the work of art departs from so-called natural appearances; nor is a work necessarily ugly because it is like something we are accustomed to treating as lovable. The one irrefutable demonstration of this is to be found in the Crucifixion; it is also the most "terrible" in the Scriptural sense. We are told by the liturgy that there is no beauty that we should desire for Him, the Crucified; that is, no beauty of this world as we choose to see it, no loveliness, no glamour. Could you imagine Good Friday, as it actually was, on a magazine cover? Yet we are repelled and indignant over a Rouault painting that (even so) can only *suggest* the horror of the Cross. (Conversely, we cannot abide the classic Christian interpretation of the Cross, which, because it understands the above, shows only the triumph of Easter and worships only glorified wounds and the achievement of Redemption as in the Eric Gill engraving reproduced here.)

These misunderstandings are variously felt by different persons. Different kinds of work suffer in different ways. Painting suffers most, music perhaps least. Most people are still able to appreciate melody for its own sake—or even chamber music—and do not insist that the composer shall imitate any natural noise. But few can approach painting or sculpture in the same way, even those who are charmed by it. In the long run, as the Ming poet Feng Meng-lung discerned, such

> Beauty is but a caress cold and bare,
> Veiled by a comely form to cheat and snare,
> Yet many a hero falls beneath its spell,
> Forgetting dust's the ultimate farewell.

That there is a beauty, however, independent of human love is no doubt

a statement many—even whole schools—declare false. More often than not they insist on imitation, some kind of ethical content, "good feeling" or message, forgetting that neither photography nor sermonizing is the artist's business.

Beauty is not to be confused with the loveliness of a magazine cover. Beauty is absolute; the lovely is lovable relative to our love of it. Our ability to enjoy beauty is as absolute and independent as our ability to love, and there must be no confusion about these sacred precincts, even though the ideal in all human life is the combination of the two powers, as when a man not only knows the loveliness but understands the unique beauty of a woman as a person.

The taste of apples is lovely only if we taste and love their taste, but there can be no doubt about the absolute and independent beauty of an apple as such, a part of nature, something created by God to praise Him in its own separate mysterious way. So a Madonna of Eric Gill or Giotto is beautiful with an absolute, we may even say pure kind of beauty; the Madonnas of Raphael or the 19th century Pre-Raphaelites are only lovely because they portray a kind of woman who is lovable to those who love that kind of woman, and in the attitude or pose which is charming to those who are charmed by it. It is a commonplace, of course, that the woman who posed for the majority of Raphael's Madonnas was his mistress.

That there is beauty, however, independent of human love is no doubt a statement many declare false, and whole schools of philosophy have built their systems on the denial of such absolutes. But where the so-called traditional view of art and its doctrines are concerned there can be no doubt. Even the ancient Hindus praised the making of divine images in accordance with canonical prescriptions, condemning the portrayal of merely human likenesses as *not heavenward leading.* So we must take account of two quite different kinds of portraiture: posthumous, hieratic, and ideal on the one hand; profanely and sentimentally lifelike on the other. We should discover before it is too late that there has always existed in Europe, as well as Asia and Africa, a tradition of ideal and essential portraiture, of which full account must be taken if we are to understand the underlying significance of medieval art and of such moderns as Rouault, Gill, Barlach, and such religious as Sister Thomasita and Sister Mary of the Compassion.

After all, we must remember that the most sacred image in Rome itself is not by Raphael, or even Fra Angelico, but is the very archaic and "difficult" Salus Populi Romani in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, which is said to be by Saint Luke and is the painting of Our Lady and Christ given as an example by St. Thomas in the *Summa.*

The relationship between the outward appearance and the interior image is analogous to that between the aesthetic surfaces of an actual painting and *the picture that is not in colors.* Similarly, there is the relationship between what is meant by a novel itself and the mere external

business of the language in which it is written. There is always the profound distinction between the looking-glass image made by an artist and the veritable spiritual essence which is the sole product of and reason for great art. As cannot be repeated too often of philosophy, there are the *term*, the *concept*, and the *reality* which alone makes the other two important. Have we not required of the artist in our time that he turn his back on reality in the servile commerce of mere terms and concepts beyond which only the exceptional dare go?

Throughout the East, Africa, and South America, however, there remains a constant manifestation of Beauty; and this in spite of poverty and the lack of the mechanical triumphs of our civilization. As a matter of fact, the less Western the influence, the more interesting the culture. Fabrics, paintings, jewelry, carvings, and furniture, where made simply for native use, offer the greatest challenge to the artist as well as the anthropologist. The motives are abstractions of natural forms, severe in arrangement like the Madonna of St. Luke mentioned above, but enriched through excellent workmanship into objects of universal value. The inevitable conclusion is that the artist grinds the lens through which people may come to see nature; if only for an instant. We are more often than not unconscious of the beauty near us unless faced with strong sensations, such as those produced by a flaming sunset and a tempestuous sea. The direct expression of the natural world in design can act as a lens to give insight into the meaning of all form, and St. Thomas for one never hesitates to explain the nature of God Himself, the Trinity, or Creation in terms of the work of home-building or statue-making. The translation of forms, through the artist's experience and talent, into objects of wonder and significance, permits the imagination of all to be stirred, their consciousness refreshed, in an infinitely greater degree than ever is possible through photographic elements. Yet the photographic principle has been accepted as a guidepost of modern civilization, and it plays havoc with normal reactions to the point where our brains attempt to dictate what our eyes may see. Rather than be Giotto or Michelangelo the "successful" artist is required to submit himself to the specifications of Eastman Kodak and big screen television.

We think we have all read a great deal, but in fact we are swamped with objects, theories, and surroundings that are far more recent than the Declaration of Independence. For that matter, it is conveniently forgotten that the definition of art practiced by Jefferson and the Founders of the Constitution followed the same *norma* and historical view St. Thomas did. (See the title essay in *The Roots of American Culture* by Constance Rourke, New York, 1942.) When good painting or sculpture of whatever period is so far beyond the comprehension of the average person educated in our schools that he has to be taught carefully how to enjoy a work of art, the phenomenon is worthy of analysis. And further underlining how insist-

ently uncertain is any judgment of the work of our own time, there are the worthy souls who accept their inspiration only from certain classics.

It is pathetic that so much of the confusion in these matters is genuine (or at least seems to be for the confused). But good intentions—like my own in attempting this article—do not guarantee results. What does seem promising, however, is our modern tendency to distinguish between the *classic* and the *classical*; so the Middle Ages are now treated with respect by serious scholars in all fields, and there is for the first time since the 16th century real sympathy for culture of Africa and the Orient. The term *classic* has always had to do with work of the first rank, regardless of origin; the term *classical* with Greece and Rome, where, as is the case with any civilization, the bulk of what was produced is not of the first rank, or as *classic* as certain primitive African bronzes.

What we most suffer from in ideological matters today is the ignorance (culpable or otherwise) of this distinction. During the Italian Renascence, there was at least an attempt to know what Greek and Roman artists knew; there was an attempt at something other than merely memorizing and copying the results of their knowledge. But at the heart of our most extreme socialist doctrines there is the same sentimental yearning for an Erewhon—a Nowhere, in which Plato, the Greek sculptors, Horace and company are supposed to have lived. Of course, this mythical Golden Age never existed outside of the German universities (which, by the way, have proven that Plato, Michelangelo, Shakespeare and other choice souls were German long before Hitler). Therefore it is important to take account of Marx, the most influential product ever turned out in the image and likeness of the German Enlightenment.

> . . . even after the art of portraying the human body in sculpture had made considerable progress, religious sculpture remained faithful to the shapeless old stones. For, according to Pausanias, "the ugliest, like the oldest, deserves the greatest respect."
>
> This peculiarity of religious feeling was made a principle of Christian art. Marx made a note on the following passage on Gothic sculpture by Grund: "Sculpture lived mainly on the alms of architecture. Statues of saints filled the interior and exterior walls of buildings; in their multiplicity they expressed the excess of worship: small in appearance, lean and angular in shape, awkward and unnatural in pose, they were below any real artistry, just as man, their creator, was below himself." (*The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, Mikhail Lifshitz, New York, 1938.)

In Moscow today, no one could think of building anything meant to glorify the current Russian orthodoxy without a portico or colonnade checked against the measurements of some Greek temple made by the German professors under the kaisers; to think otherwise is to imagine some fundamentalist American preacher asking Frank Lloyd Wright to build his meeting house.

What a society is, so it will build, so it will patronize the arts. The exact relationship between the errors of modern capitalism and of socialism which the encyclicals point out, and their expression in the arts is too narrow a topic for our purpose here. Furthermore, it is of no more than negative interest, whereas the discussion of the traditional and ideal conception

of portraiture is affirmative and beautifully unconnected with the momentary and selfish concerns of our economic life. The fact must be faced, nevertheless, that very many Catholics in good conscience agree with Marx in his low estimate of such things as medieval sculpture rather than with the enduring traditions of not only the Church but mankind.

SAINT AUGUSTINE *By Carl Merschel*

Contributors

CARL MERSCHEL is the designer of the Catholic Chapel at the University of Chicago. FRANK FORD'S "Kingdom of the Blind," published here for the first time, was presented as a feature of the Catholic University Playwriting Festival in the summer of 1947, and subsequently was produced at St. John's University. Ford's short play, "Lucifer at Large," was presented on television over a national network on Sunday, October 25th. JOHN LYNCH has contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Commonweal*, *Pacific Spectator*, etc. He held a Fellowship in Creative Writing at Stanford University in 1948-49. SR. M. MAURA teaches at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. BROTHER D. JOHN is Vice President of La Salle College. FR. ROSELIEP of Loras College is a frequent contributor to **FOUR QUARTERS**. Engraving by ERIC GILL through the courtesy of Carl Merschel.

Manuscripts and other correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, **FOUR QUARTERS**, La Salle College, Philadelphia 41, Pa. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Annual Subscription: Two Dollars.

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